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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: SLEIMAN WITH CODEL ACKERMAN SAYS  
COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL PEACE AGREEMENT NEEDED TO CHALLENGE  
HIZBALLAH

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) In a December 13 meeting with visiting Codel Ackerman, President Michel Sleiman emphasized the need for a comprehensive regional peace agreement in order, "with time", to disarm Hizballah. Sleiman noted that Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and UNIFIL presence south of the Litani since 2006 was a positive step towards diminishing Hizballah's influence in the south, but acknowledged the need to assert control over the group north of the Litani River.

¶2. (C) Sleiman acknowledged having concerns about indirect peace negotiations between Syria and Israel, but said Lebanon could gain from a potential solution. However, he dismissed the possibility of any Lebanon-Israel talks. Sleiman also cited terrorism as one of the main challenges facing Lebanon; he said the threat of terrorism in the country was particularly dangerous since attacks could trigger wider sectarian conflict. End Summary.

STRESSING CONTINUED U.S. SUPPORT

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¶3. (C) Codel Ackerman, accompanied by Ambassador and Embosfs, met with President Michel Sleiman December 13 at Baabda Palace. Codel members were Rep. Gary Ackerman, D-NY, chairman of the HFAC subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, and subcommittee members Rep. Jeff Flake, R-AZ; Rep. Joe Wilson, R-SC; Rep. Brian Higgins, D-NY; and Rep. Ron Klein, R-FL; as well as subcommittee staffers David Adams, Greg McCarthy, and Howard Diamond. Ackerman opened the meeting by emphasizing to President Sleiman the U.S. commitment to helping Lebanon succeed; he noted U.S. policy toward Lebanon was not "an appendage" of our policies toward other countries in the region.

¶4. (C) Support for Lebanon's independence and U.S. assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) will continue into the next administration, Ackerman said. He cited Lebanon's historical role as a multiconfessional center of culture and said the U.S. wants to assist Lebanon in strengthening this position. Ackerman highlighted the important role of Lebanese-Americans in the United States.

REFUGEES, TERRORISM, AND  
REGIONAL PEACE

15. (C) Sleiman said that Lebanon, as a weak country, needs international political support to protect it from interference by its neighbors. On the issue of Palestinian refugees, he said insufficient infrastructure, employment, and other resources existed to support 400,000 Palestinian refugees; the camps are also a security concern for the GOL. Meanwhile, millions of Lebanese live abroad, Sleiman said. The country's economic and security situations need to be improved in order to entice some of them to return home. Lebanon should "receive its own people" rather than incorporate Palestinians, he said. Sleiman argued the threat of terrorism was particularly worrisome in Lebanon, because the country's multiconfessional nature made it possible that terrorist strikes on particular communities could create larger internal conflicts.

16. (C) Codel members asked about the negotiations between Syria and Israel. Sleiman acknowledged he had concerns about Syrian-Israeli indirect talks but suggested that, if the U.S. could "control" discussions, the outcome could benefit Lebanon. Codel Ackerman stressed the U.S. commitment to making sure Lebanon benefited from whatever resulted from the Syrian-Israeli talks. Asked about the possibility of Israeli-Lebanese discussions, Sleiman argued that there were no strictly "bilateral" issues to justify such talks. Instead, Sleiman said he supported comprehensive regional

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peace negotiations -- such as the Madrid and Annapolis processes. Bilateral Lebanon-Israel issues were covered by UN resolutions and should be pursued under that umbrella, he emphasized.

HIZBALLAH'S ARMS ARE AN  
INTERNAL POLITICAL ISSUE

17. (C) Responding to a question from Codel Ackerman about Hizballah's arms, Sleiman said that this topic would be debated in internal dialogue processes such as the current National Dialogue roundtable, which will meet next on December 22. He stressed Hizballah's historical role in providing national protection in the south, and said it would be difficult to dismantle the organization after so many years without an LAF presence in the region. Though it is positive that the LAF has been present south of the Litani since 2006, said Sleiman, disarming Hizballah would take time. Sleiman believed that although the LAF and UNIFIL control the area south of the Litani river, the GOL needed to "find a mechanism" to control Hizballah north of the Litani River.

18. (C) Sleiman argued that a comprehensive regional peace agreement would help the GOL curtail shipments of arms to Hizballah. According to Sleiman, Hizballah has an interest in keeping peace in the country. Settlement of the issue of Sheba'a Farms would make it easier for the GOL to find a political solution to the group's weapons, he added. Sleiman expressed hope that Lebanon could keep peace through implementation of UNSCR 1701. He said the GOL will, "with time," find a solution to the challenges posed by Hizballah.

SISON